

# **LGA Communications Strategy 2021-2024**



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# 1. About the LGA

The LGA is a membership-based organisation which provides a voice for local government in South Australia and leadership for the sector.

Originally established in 1875 and reformed in 1968 into its current form, the LGA is recognised as the peak representative body for local government in South Australia.

The Association works in three key areas: leadership and advocacy, capacity building and sustainability, and best practice and continuous improvement.

The LGA is federated nationally with interstate and territory associations in the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

The LGA is also supported by the Parliament of South Australia in Schedule 1 to the *Local Government Act 1999*.

The LGA is governed by a Board of Directors, which receives input on policy issues from committees of regional and metropolitan members, the South Australian Regional Organisation of Councils (SAROC) and the Greater Adelaide Regional Organisation of Councils (GAROC). Advice on services and operations is also provided by an Audit and Risk Committee and CEO Advisory Group.

Each year, the LGA conducts an Ordinary General Meeting and an Annual General Meeting, where member councils contribute to the policy direction of the LGA by submitting and voting on items of business of strategic importance to local government.

The LGA secretariat, led by the CEO, has responsibility for implementing the direction established by the LGA Board and through General Meetings.

The LGA also incorporates two separate commercial entities – LGA Procurement and LGASA Mutual – both of which are governed by their own Board of Directors.

# 2. Strategic context

South Australian councils provide a wide range of services that support and improve their communities.

There are some services that all councils are required by legislation to provide, and some that councils choose to deliver to meet the needs and expectations of their community. As each community is different, not all councils provide the same services.

The brand and reputation of the local government sector is shaped by the individual experiences that community members have with councils, and the stories they hear from their family and friends and through the media.

The LGA's role is to be the "voice of local government", and communicate information that increases understanding of the role and value of councils, and how the sector operates and makes decisions.

Local government operates under state government legislation, and any changes to state laws and regulations can have a big impact on the services that councils provide, how they provide those services, and how councils make decisions. Often, changes to legislation will result in reduced local decision making and additional costs for councils and their ratepayers.

Local government collects less than 4% of taxation nationally, so funding partnerships with state and federal governments are vital in delivering significant projects.

The LGA advocates for its member councils to ensure they are supported by state and federal policy and funding decisions to effectively deliver services to their communities.

The local government sector is currently undergoing a transitional period, with changes to local government legislation and state-wide planning reforms underway, and councils and communities dealing with challenges including COVID-19 recovery and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

As a membership body, it is vital that the LGA listens to and represents members. All councils must be provided with many opportunities to provide feedback on the LGA's activities, and be genuinely engaged in the development of policy and services for the sector.

It is also important that the LGA provides timely, relevant and concise information to members about current issues, developments and opportunities. Effective communication with members will support increased capacity, foster greater collaboration across councils and promote best practice in governance and service delivery.

This strategy has been developed to provide a framework for the LGA's communication with its members, key decision makers in government and parliament, the media, peak bodies and the South Australian community.

The LGA's policy committees, SAROC and GAROC, have also adopted separate Communication Plans that outline their specific goals and strategies for communicating and engaging with members and stakeholders.

### 3. Communications goals

The key communications goals of the LGA are to:

**Increase awareness** – increase community awareness of the services provided by local government and promote opportunities for the community to participate in local government decision making.

**Effectively advocate** – effectively advocate on behalf of members for policy and funding outcomes that support councils to do great things for their communities.

**Engage with members** – create a range of opportunities for the LGA to hear from its members and understand their diverse needs and priorities, and respond by providing high quality information and resources that assist the sector to perform its many roles effectively and efficiently.

### 4. Audience

To make progress against its communications goals, the LGA needs to regularly communicate with a range of different groups, including member councils, members of state and federal parliament, state government agencies, media, peak bodies, and the broader community.

Communications goal	Target audience	Priority sub-segments
Increase awareness	Community	Target audiences identified through annual community survey
Effectively advocate	Government Media	MPs Senior public servants

	Peak bodies	Industry leaders Key influencers
Engage with members	Member councils	Mayors Elected members CEOs Managers Council staff

## 5. Key messages

The LGA's key messages are the essence of what it wants to communicate and how it wants the LGA – and its members – to be perceived by its target audiences. The key messages are different for each of the LGA's communications goals.

### **Increase awareness**

- SA councils are part of your everyday
- You can make a difference

### **Effectively advocate**

- Councils:
  - are closest to communities
  - are a willing partner in government
  - are a part of the solution
  - are an efficient tier of government on a path of continuous improvement
  - are an important driver of economic development

### **Engage with members**

- The LGA is your Association
- We are better together, speaking with a strong and unified voice
- The LGA is a trusted source of information

## 6. Strategies

### 6.1 Increase awareness

A key function of the LGA is to increase community awareness and participation in local government.

The LGA undertakes an annual community survey which tracks community perceptions of local government.

This survey shows that – when compared to state and federal governments – councils are more likely to be perceived as caring about the community, providing a voice for the community, having a vision for the community, keeping the community informed, and caring about the environment.

The survey also shows that the services councils are most recognised for include rubbish collection, libraries, parks and gardens, playgrounds, recycling, footpaths and hard waste collection.

Since 2016 the LGA has run a “SA councils - part of your everyday” campaign to raise awareness of the services councils provide and how rates support those services. In local government election years, the key messages of the campaign focus on ways that the community can get involved in local government.

This campaign is targeted to priority audiences identified through the community survey, and highlights many of the services communities most frequently associate with local government eg parks and gardens, local events, libraries, dog registrations. The framework also provides flexibility to promote other topical themes and council services that respond to what is happening in communities right now, such as councils supporting local recovery after COVID-19.

Once every four years the campaign has a focus on encouraging community members to consider nominating for their local council elections, and in 2018 this campaign focussed on underrepresented groups, which led to a significant increase in the number of women who nominated and were elected.

Building on positive relationships with local media is an opportunity to increase their awareness and understanding of local government issues and help facilitate informed reporting on the sector.

The LGA facilitates a Local Government Communicators Network (LGCN), comprised of council marketing, media and communications staff. LGCN members can help leverage the LGA’s awareness campaigns by sharing and localising campaign materials, and supporting a consistent sector-wide message.

Strategy	Audience	Communication channel
Run ongoing “part of your everyday” awareness campaign to increase positive awareness and understanding of council services	Community	Online Social media (Facebook, Instagram) Radio Print
Partner with local influencers and media outlets to run promotions, competitions and features that showcase councils’ services and facilities.	Community	Online Social media (Facebook Instagram, LinkedIn) Radio Print
Run “nominate” campaign for 2022 council elections to increase awareness and participation	Community	Online Social media (Facebook Instagram, LinkedIn) Radio

		Print
Hold regular LGCN meetings and annual Local Government Communicators Conference to increase collaboration across the sector and leverage sector-wide marketing campaigns	Council staff	Face to face meetings Webinars e-newsletter LGA events
Provide council staff with campaign materials that can be localised to promote local services and support a consistent state-wide message	Council staff	Email LGA website
Run the “My Local Services” app platform, which provides communities with up-to-date information about their local council’s programs and services	Community	Mobile app
Build relationships with local journalists to help facilitate informed reporting on local government issues	Media	Face to face meetings Email

## 6.2 Effectively advocate

A key function of the LGA is advocating on behalf of its membership for funding and policy outcomes that support councils to do great things for their communities.

The LGA’s advocacy agenda is set by member councils through motions passed at General Meetings as well as the plans and policies adopted by the LGA Board, SAROC and GAROC. This agenda is set out in the LGA Advocacy Plan.

Regular communication with key decision makers, including through regular face-to-face meetings, is the foundation of the LGA’s advocacy program.

The LGA also provides evidence-based submissions to a wide range of consultation and review processes, which are made available publicly through the LGA website.

Traditional (print, radio and TV) and social media are used to promote LGA advocacy priorities, and when necessary, the LGA runs targeted campaigns on specific issues of importance to the local government sector. Previous examples have included campaigns around increases to the solid waste levy (Bin Tax), and new planning legislation.

Where possible, the LGA looks for opportunities to partner with other peak bodies to advocate for shared priorities.

Strategy	Audience	Communication Channel
Build relationships with key decision makers in state and federal parliament and government to increase their understanding of local government issues	MPs Key public servants	Face to face meetings Emails Phone calls LGA meetings and events
Provide and promote evidence-based submissions to state and federal governments	Government MPs Media	Submissions to government LGA website
Use social media to highlight advocacy priorities and engage with key stakeholders	Government MPs Media Community	Social media (Twitter, LinkedIn)
Run campaigns on key advocacy issues as required	MPs Government Peak bodies Community	Online Social media Video
Build relationships with media to increase media coverage of LGA advocacy priorities	Media	Face to face meetings Email LGA meetings and events
Maintain fortnightly 'LG Snapshot' stakeholder e-newsletter promoting advocacy priorities	MPs Government Media Peak bodies	e-newsletter
Build relationships and establish partnerships with key industry groups and other stakeholders to identify and progress opportunities for joint advocacy	Peak bodies	Face to face meetings Forums, workshops and conferences Nominations to outside bodies



## 6.3 Engage with members

As the ‘voice of local government’ in South Australia, the LGA must be close to its members and provide many opportunities for listening, sharing information and responding. Genuine engagement and collaboration between the LGA and its members is essential to ensuring that the LGA’s advocacy and services meet the needs of its members.

Ensuring council elected members and staff are informed about key issues, opportunities and developments will also build capacity in the local government sector and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of councils.

In 2016 the LGA implemented a suite of e-newsletters targeted to council members, CEOs and stakeholders, providing fortnightly updates on local government issues, and highlighting opportunities for member councils to provide feedback and input into consultation processes.

The open rate for these newsletters from CEOs and council members has consistently been well above the industry average.

Members can also subscribe to a weekly LGA Latest News e-newsletter to receive updates on a broad range of local government topics, consultation opportunities and events.

The LGA undertakes an annual member survey, and participants are asked how they would prefer to receive information from the LGA.

Mayors, council members, CEOs and managers have a preference for email communications or council visits from LGA representatives, while other council staff prefer to receive communications through email, the LGA Latest News e-newsletter, or the LGA’s website.

The 2020 members survey indicated a higher level of satisfaction for participants that had been in contact with the LGA over the past six months, reinforcing the importance of regular member communication.

These survey results also indicated an opportunity to increase awareness and satisfaction for council staff in non-management positions.

Increased and consistent engagement with professional network groups within councils is an opportunity to improve communication with specialist council staff.

The strategies below outline the broad framework under which the LGA will engage with its members, but a separate Engagement Plan will also be developed and updated each year to ensure the LGA continues to effectively engage with its member councils.

Strategy	Audience	Communications channel
Maintain a rolling schedule of council visits by LGA Board Members and senior staff	Mayors Council members CEOs Managers	Face to face meetings
Implement a program of online sector briefings around key themes and emerging issues	Mayors Council members	Online/Zoom meetings

	CEOs Managers	
Provide updates on local government issues, LGA programs and consultation opportunities through weekly 'Latest News' e-newsletter	Mayors Council members CEOs Managers Council staff	e-newsletter
Provide fortnightly updates to council members through 'President's Update' e-newsletter	Mayors Council members	e-newsletter Video
Provide fortnightly updates to council CEOs through 'CEO's Update' e-newsletter	CEOs	e-newsletter Video
Provide regular updates to specialist council staff groups through targeted e-newsletters eg governance, emergency management, procurement, training.	Council staff	e-newsletter Video
Highlight local government success stories and promote LGA and sector programs through social media channels	Mayors Council members CEOs Managers Council staff	Social media (LinkedIn and Twitter) Video
Produce a sector-wide annual value proposition, as well as individual value propositions for all member councils	Mayors Council members CEOs Managers	Print Website
Hold LGA events each year that provide opportunities for councils to come together to discuss issues of strategic importance and share examples of best practice.	Mayors Council members CEOs	Face to face meetings LGA events
Solicit feedback from members through annual Members Survey	Mayors Council members	Survey

	CEOs Managers Council staff	
Attend and provide updates at Regional LGA meetings	Regional LGAs Mayors CEOs	Face to face meetings
Continue to produce and distribute an Annual Business Plan highlighting priorities and performance targets.	Mayors Council members CEOs Managers Council staff	Print Website
Continue to produce and distribute an Annual Report to report on performance against priorities.	Mayors Council members CEOs Managers Council staff	Print Website
Increase engagement with professional networks within councils by attending and hosting meetings and developing targeted e-newsletters	Council staff	Face to face meetings Workshops, forums and conferences e-newsletter Email
Investigate benefits and opportunities for closed and curated social media groups	Council members Council staff	Social media (LinkedIn, Facebook)
Continue to enhance the LGA website as a trusted and easily accessible source of information	Council members Council staff	LGA website
Implement the communication plans endorsed by SAROC and GAROC	Refer to separate plans	Refer to separate plans

## 7. Evaluation

This communications strategy will be reviewed every twelve months to ensure it continues to meet the needs and priorities of the LGA and its member councils. This annual review will take into account new technologies, and new and emerging priorities.

Progress against the LGA's communication's goals will be tracked against the following measures, and reported annually to the LGA Board.

Communications goal	Target
Increase awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year-on-year growth in the reach of the LGA's community awareness campaigns</li> <li>• Maintain or increase the community's understanding of the role of local government, as measured through the LGA's annual community survey</li> <li>• An increase in both the number of total nominations and nominations from women in the 2022 council elections</li> <li>• Annual growth in the number of followers and engagement across the LGA's social media accounts</li> </ul>
Effectively advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain an overall value of LGA membership of at least \$2 million per council over a rolling three-year average</li> <li>• Placement of at least 24 positive media stories every twelve months promoting the LGA's advocacy priorities</li> <li>• Achieve an average value for money for advocacy services of at least 7/10 on an annual basis, as measured through the LGA's member survey</li> </ul>
Engage with members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All South Australian councils draw upon the resources provided on the LGA members website</li> <li>• Maintain an open rate for LGA e-newsletters above industry averages</li> <li>• Hold at least six online sector briefings around key themes and emerging issues for local government every twelve months</li> </ul>